

A greater salvation

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[0:00] So the reading this morning is from Ephesians chapter 2, we're reading verses 11 to 22. Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and might reconcile to us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to one spirit, to the Father.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

[2:16] In him you also are being built together, into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Matthew Marks Julia, thanks so much indeed for reading.

Let me add my welcome. And why don't I lead us in prayer before we look at Ephesians 2 together this morning. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this great privilege we have this morning of hearing your words read and proclaimed for us. thank you for the wonderful thing that you're a god who speaks to us and so we pray please would you be at work in power this morning help us to understand your words help us to take it to heart pray that we'd be transformed by it for Jesus sake amen well my aim this morning is to convince us that God's plan his master plan for the whole of eternity is on track we've seen already what the plan is just glance back to Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10 God's plan set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him that's in Jesus things in heaven and things on earth it is God's plan to put Jesus Christ at the very center of a reordered universe the new creation and yet I guess even as I even as I say that I guess that for so many of us that might sound like a complete pipe dream just pie in the sky the kind of thing that perhaps you might expect to hear in church on Sunday morning and actually you know really has no relevance at all on Monday morning after all we're used aren't we to people making big promises Martin Luther King I have a dream Margaret Thatcher's dream of a share-owning democracy John Major's dream of a class for society Barack Obama yes we can Donald Trump let's make America great again and yet of course the point is that every time someone articulates a new dream it simply underlines doesn't it the previous one has failed and therefore as well as convincing us that God's plan is on track my aim this morning is to provide us with concrete evidence that it's on track because you see if God is going to bring about a whole new universe under the rule of Jesus Christ then something enormously powerful needs to happen doesn't it and it has it's why in chapter 1 verse 19 the apostle Paul prayed that these Christians in Ephesus would know the immeasurable greatness of God's power it's why last week in chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 we saw God's power to raise those who are spiritually dead to new life have a look again at verse 4 but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ and now in chapter 2 verses 11 to 22 we see God's power to bring those who are alienated from each other and from God together to belong to him as his people you'll see there's an outline on the back of the service sheet first of all from alienation verses 11 to 13 have a look at verse 11 therefore remember

that at one time you gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands you and i live in a deeply divided world just as the first century world of the apostle paul was deeply divided and the great fault line in the first century was the dividing line that ran between those who belonged to god's people the jewish people and those who didn't the gentiles one commentator writes until christ came the gentiles were an object of contempt for the jews the barrier between them was absolute if a jewish boy married a gentile girl or if a jewish girl married a gentile boy the funeral of that jewish boy or girl was carried out such contact with a gentile was the equivalent of death now in verse 11 paul is speaking to the gentiles who would have made up the majority of the church in ephesus he reminds them of what they were before they put their trust in jesus verse 12 remember that you were at that time separated from christ alienated from the commonwealth of israel and strangers to the covenants of promise having no hope and without god in the world first separated from christ separated from god's messiah his promised king second alienated from the people of god the very people through whom those blessings came third strangers therefore to god's promises god's promises to abraham isaac jacob david and others the promises through which god promised salvation fourth without hope fifth without god in the world perhaps you've seen refugee camps near calais as you've driven back from a holiday or pictures of migrant camps in greece or italy masses of people people who don't belong people without hope who are excluded and that is the picture here and i imagine that since most of us are gentiles non-jewish it describes what each every one of us is by nature like without christ no doubt the citizens of first century ephesus a prosperous city no doubt they had many hopes hopes for the future hopes for their city hopes for their children and families and they certainly had many gods and places of worship and yet actually they had no hope of the sort that really matters no hope of life beyond the grave no hope of life beyond the grave and no knowledge of the one true living god just as the citizens of 21st century london have many hopes and worship many gods other religions or the gods of success reputation and prosperity and yet in reality without hope and without god now in many ways the jew gentile divide of the first century was unique and yet of course even our most recent world history is a history of division between black and white in south africa between hutu and tutsi in rwanda between serb and bosnian in the balkans between protestant and catholic in northern ireland between the haves and the have-nots between classes between the sexes between communities and of course remembrance sunday in particular is a day is it not when we remember human division and conflict just as of course we experience division in our own lives just as we will this next week no doubt as we have done the last week as our colleagues perhaps can't bear to be part of the same team or neighbors fall out with each other or communications break down within families i take it it's why there's such an epidemic of alienation and loneliness in our culture as the effects of human sin are seen everywhere wherever you look and that is why human attempts at dealing with division will always fail it's why notice in this chapter in this passage the apostle paul doesn't encourage a jew and gentile to come together and sit down together and dialogue and discover their differences and work out for themselves a way forward and work out for themselves how to love each other he doesn't do that just as pledging ourselves to peace as no doubt so many will do today is not the answer because you see the apostle paul knows that no human answer to the problem of human alienation from each other will ever work instead what paul is going to do is he's going to provide a uniquely christian answer a uniquely gospel answer because it's only when you deal with human beings alienation from god our vertical alienation so to speak that you can then deal with alienation from each other the horizontal alienation the headline is there in verse 13 but now in christ jesus you who are once far off have been brought near by the blood of christ and that is unpacked in our next section so from alienation to peace verses 14 to 18 just have a look at those verses the key word is peace it's there you'll see in verse 14 it's there in verse 15 it's there twice in verse 17 notice really that peace is a person because it's only jesus who brings peace between people as well as peace with god verse 14 for he himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two so making peace now in the first century the division between jew and gentile was expressed most graphically by the architecture of the temple in jerusalem there was literally a dividing wall which meant the gentiles they could go into the court of the gentiles but no further it acted as a massive no entry sign a visual aid of their alienation from god but the division was also symbolized by the old testament law which god gave to his people to guard them from getting caught up in the sin of the nations around them

and yet of course the fact was that for all their great religious privileges the Jewish person in the first century was in just the same boat as the Gentile it's why we saw last week in chapter 2 verse 3 Paul says of himself as a Jew we were by nature objects of wrath like the rest of mankind because the purpose of the law in the Old Testament was to point the way to Jesus Christ and when Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins that curtain in the temple was ripped in two from top to bottom signifying the way to God was now open to all and open to all on exactly the same basis as Paul writes in verse 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility Jew and Gentile saved in exactly the same way Gentiles were far off Jews were near both received the forgiveness of sins both received peace with God in the same way through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and by believing in Him and that of course is a very leveling thing isn't it it levels all cultures completely it means there's no room for pride no room for boasting no room for one-upmanship it means that all are reconciled to God in exactly the same

[14:57] way verse 18 for through Him we both have access in one spirit to the Father peace with God and therefore peace with each other we had the great privilege of going to Cape Town in South Africa three years ago as a family perhaps you've been there or two or perhaps you've imagined what you might do if you if you went there what I wonder might be the highlight of a trip to Cape Town or perhaps a trip up Table Mountain to see the wonderful views across the city perhaps heading down to Cape Point the second most southerly point in Africa or perhaps the world-renowned botanical gardens in Kirstenbosch or going to Boulders Beach to see the penguins it's a great city lots of highlights but in point of fact actually the most wonderful part of our visit to Cape Town was Sunday morning church we went to church in a relatively poor area on the Cape Flats near the airport and it was completely remarkable because in that church there was a completely equal split between black white and colored people the three ways in which the apartheid regime categorized people and it's a wonderful thing because in a country still divided by race and income inequality where you can almost smell the fear between communities here was unity from alienation to peace and it occurred to Rachel and I we said to each other actually in a country like this as in any country actually only the Master of Jesus Christ can bring about such unity such peace where there is such alienation so let me ask do you know what it is to experience this peace for yourself peace with God and peace with others it may of course be that you've heard the message of Jesus Christ before and you've done nothing about it it may be that you look at the world around and you recognize the need for peace and yet actually you've never really made the connection that our alienation from each other is because of an even more fundamental alienation from God and therefore to be at peace with each other we need firstly to be at peace with God himself because the point is this now that the great theological division you see between

Jew and Gentile has been abolished there's the potential for all other human divisions to be abolished not just the Jew Gentile division but every other human division to be abolished in Christ because the message of Jesus crosses all cultures and all barriers it means not only that you don't have to become a Jew if you're a Gentile in order to be reconciled to God through Jesus it means you don't have to for example have to become European if you're Asian you don't have to become middle class if you're working class you don't have to become an introvert if you're an extrovert you don't have to become middle aged or whatever it is if you're young and so on because it means that actually every source of division within our world in Christ there is peace so from alienation to peace which means thirdly and very gloriously that God's plan for His

God's plan for His world is on track I'm going to read out verses 19 to 22 and I want you to ask yourself the question what is God describing so eyes down on the text eyes down on Ephesians 2 verse 19 to 22 and as I read it ask yourself the question what is Paul describing so then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord in Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit what's He describing the church God's new society a new humanity where verse 19 strangers and aliens are now fellow citizens in other words where all belong built verse 20 on the foundation of the prophets and apostles with Jesus at the center indeed verse 22 the very dwelling place of God by His Spirit I said at the start that I was going to provide concrete evidence this morning that God's plan is on track His great master plan for His universe I wonder if you've worked it out yet the evidence is not just in that church in Cape Town but it is all around us we are the evidence those of us who put our

trust in Jesus the church is the climax of God's purposes in this age it is a foretaste of the age to come a foretaste of chapter 1 verse 10 the day when God's plan to unite all things under Jesus will be completed because you see the end point of history if you look to the very end point of history the end point is church people from every nation every tribe language and tongue who have been reconciled to God through Christ reconciled to each other gathered around the heavenly throne so just look around this building can you bear to do that for a few moments to a very un-English thing and just look around not at the building but look around at each other many of us are from all sorts of different backgrounds many of us have very little naturally speaking in common with each other all sorts of different personalities and yet actually as we gather here this morning we are a living demonstration of where the whole world is heading where history is heading and then think not just of one local church but then think of churches scattered across the world the great diversity again all sorts of different people in all sorts of different cultures and languages each one united reconciled to God reconciled to each other that is a demonstration globally of where history is heading just perhaps as you might be looking for a new home or a new apartment or something like that and you see a housing development advertised by an estate agent and as you look at the photographs although it kind of looks wonderful but what doesn't look wonderful you say to yourself on the estate agent's website so you have all the nagging doubts will it actually be like that have they started building yet can I have confidence in it is this a worthwhile investment so what do you do well you go and have a look you go to the building site you look at one of the show homes on display and you think to yourself do you know what this is it is fantastic it is fantastic and each one of those show homes a demonstration of where the whole development is heading as if to say come back and the whole thing will be like this well in a far greater way when we doubt God's plan is on track look at the church it is God's show home if you like his showcase for a whole new creation now the implications of Ephesians 2 verse 11 22 are enormous not least in terms of the way we function and relate to one another as church and the whole of the second half of Ephesians is going to be about that but the primary application at this point of the letter I think is rather different and perhaps rather surprising at first sight rather unremarkable I wonder if you spotted the application as it's read to us it's there in verse 11 therefore remember and again verse 12 remember now let me ask you does remembering sound very spiritual I suspect probably not and yet it is the very thing God wants us to take away this morning to equip us to live for Jesus because remember

[24 : 36] Ephesus was a powerful city the second biggest city in the Roman Empire a city in which political power and spiritual power and cultural and financial power were all tied up in the worship of the great goddess Artemis and by contrast to be a Christian to be a follower of Jesus Christ would have felt very weak indeed very unimpressive indeed very much on the edge of society just as it does of course living in the powerhouse that is 21st century London so let me send us away with two things to remember from Ephesians 2 11 to 22 first of all remember how bankrupt our culture is if you and I follow the gods and idols of this world the good life having an impressive career having a beautiful family that goes with it our culture will celebrate that and it will cheer us and pat us on the back and say well done if we follow

Jesus Christ it won't and that will feel costly to be perhaps on the edge of a friendship group perhaps to be the only Christian in our class at school or in our place of work or in our family at which point we need to remember how bankrupt our culture is to be without Christ is to be without hope in our world it is to be without God it's something to remember isn't it on a day perhaps on the days when we feel we're missing out by being a follower of Jesus or perhaps on a day when we look at our friends or colleagues or neighbours and their life is going well life is successful they haven't a care in the world and we are tempted to envy and to lose heart as a Christian John Newton one time slave trader had a very deep sense of what he would have been of what his life would have been like had he not put his trust in Jesus and he went on to pour out his praise to the God who saved him in the hymn

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me remember how bankrupt our culture is what you would be without Christ without God and without hope but secondly remember how significant the churches you see just look around what do you see look at the global church all those across the globe who have put their trust in Jesus what do you see when you're looking at God's pilot scheme for the reconciled world of the future and you see it's having confidence in this great plan of God to unite all things under Jesus in a new creation in the future that will enable us

not to lose heart as followers of Jesus Christ today it's a thing to store up for the moment when you say to yourself what am I doing following Jesus or when friends colleagues family ask us the same question for when

Jesus and his church and his purposes in our world look so small and weak and unimpressive when the world around us looks the opposite powerful attractive enticing God is showing us this morning that the church far from being the kind of irrelevance that our culture assumes it is it actually couldn't be of greater significance because it is the concrete demonstration that God's plans for his world are on track it is God's show home if you like for the reconciled world of the future let's pray together in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit heavenly father we praise you very much for your plan your great master plan for all time to unite all things in Christ in a new creation and thank you heavenly father for this wonderful reminder of the huge significance of this gathering in this building this morning all sorts of people from different backgrounds different types different personalities united in Christ reconciled in him to you our heavenly father and the enormous significance likewise of your global church and we pray therefore please would you help us to remember these things help us to remember how significant the church is help us to remember how bankrupt our world is help us not to lose heart as followers of Jesus Christ in a world so full of power and where to follow him so often looks and feels unimpressive and we ask it in his name amen to